



Screenshot of Louise Brooks in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

## RECOMMENDED READINGS

(Annotated and in chronological order)

- 1947** Kracauer, Siegfried. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Princeton UP, 1966 [1947], pp. 178-179.

Kracauer devotes just one paragraph to *Pandora's Box* in this book on Weimar film and culture, but this source is nonetheless relevant to study of the film as it has generated significant scholarly response. The paragraph comes towards the end of a long section on Pabst and the artistic genre of New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). As such, Kracauer is primarily interested in Pabst's direction of the film. He cites and agrees with one of the

film's early and prominent reviewers, Harry Potamkin, who considered the shadowy, foggy, mirror-heavy aesthetics of the film to be too fantastical and abstract (too Expressionist in style), and not realistic enough. This style did not suit the stable era in which the film was produced, Kracauer concludes.

- 1952** Eisner, Lotte H. "Pabst and the Miracle of Louise Brooks." *The Haunted Screen. Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*. Translated by Roger Greaves. Thames and Hudson, 1969 [1952], pp. 295-308.

Eisner's chapter on Pabst and Brooks in her landmark book on German cinema is among the film's most influential and authoritative scholarship. Eisner reads *Pandora's Box* alongside Pabst's other films, and pairs it together with *Diary of a Lost Girl* (*Tagebuch einer Verlorenen*), another Pabst film starring Brooks that came out just after *Pandora's Box*. For Eisner, the film's central attraction is the extraordinary physical appearance of Lulu (face and skin especially), as captured by Pabst in close ups and tilt shots. These techniques give us an instant understanding of the character, according to Eisner.

- 1982** Brooks, Louise. *Lulu in Hollywood*. Knopf, 1982.

Louise Brooks, the star of *Pandora's Box*, narrates her upbringing and life as an actor in this autobiography. Excerpts from the book, and in particular from her chapter on working with Pabst, are often used by scholars of *Pandora's Box* to bring first-person insight to readings of the film, thus making this book a relevant source for study of the film. Sections that have gained particular traction in the film's scholarship include: Brooks's comments on the open sexual culture in late-1920s Berlin, the negative reception of her starring role in the film (as an American rather than German actress), Pabst's direction of his actors, and Pabst's rejection of Marlene Dietrich for the role of Lulu. The chapter on Pabst, titled "Pabst and Lulu," originally appeared as an essay in the journal *Sight & Sound* in 1965 (vol. 34, no. 3).

- 1991** Doane, Mary Ann. "The Erotic Barter: *Pandora's Box*." *Femmes Fatales*. Routledge, 1991, pp. 142-162.

This chapter was originally published in Eric Rentschler's edited volume, *The Films of G. W. Pabst: An Extraterritorial Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 1990). Doane's chapter contextualizes the film within the cynicism of modernity in Weimar Germany, particularly its convergence with sexual transgression and gender crises. Doane asks how female subjects such as Lulu figure into modern cynicism, which usually focuses on masculinity. Doane places prominent critiques of the film (by Harry Alan Potamkin and Siegfried Kracauer) in this context as well: the film, for its critics, was too insubstantial, which Doane reads as *too feminine*. Doane turns to a compelling analysis of gazes in the film, tying them into the sexual economy within the film and the erotics of film images generally. For Doane, Lulu is at the centre of both, a mirror-like surface whose emptiness both frustrates and ultimately re-aligns various masculine gazes, desires, and crises.

- 1994** Hake, Sabine. "The Continuous Provocation of Louise Brooks." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 32, 1994, pp. 58-75.

Hake's article dwells on the status of Louise Brooks as an icon--a star of Weimar cinema--and as such, a woman who is abstracted for the purposes of fantasy creation. Hake discusses the mythologization of Brooks during and after the initial reception of *Pandora's Box*. Brooks' American nationality defined her; her version of Lulu was considered both watered-down and ultra-modern. Hake also analyzes Brooks's performance style against the context of the film's mixed reception, popular acting conventions of the time, and stereotypes of the *femme fatale* and the New Woman.

- 2000** Elsaesser, Thomas. "Lulu and the Meter Man. Louise Brooks, G. W. Pabst and *Pandora's Box*." *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary*. Routledge, 2000, pp. 259-292.

Elsaesser's scholarship on *Pandora's Box* has appeared in multiple iterations: "Lulu and the Meter Man" was first published in *Screen* in 1983 (volume 24, pp. 4-36), and a similar version was included in Eric Rentschler's 1986 edited volume *German Film and Literature* (Chapter 3, pp. 40-59). The chapter here (in *Weimar Cinema*) closely resembles the earlier *Screen* article. Elsaesser begins with context about the changing reception history of both the film and Brooks herself, Wedekind's plays, and Leopold Jessner's 1911 staging of *Die Büchse der Pandora* and 1923 film *Loulou* (starring Asta Nielsen). Elsaesser then turns to his main concern of sexuality and gender dynamics in the film, especially as embodied by Lulu. His analysis mostly focuses on the first and last scenes, and often returns to questions of the viewer's identification (or unrealized identification) with the film's figures.

- 2009** McCarthy, Margaret. "Surface Sheen and Charged Bodies. Louise Brooks as Lulu in *Pandora's Box* (1929)." *Weimar Cinema: An Essential Guide to Classic Films of the Era*, edited by Noah Isenberg, Columbia UP, 2009, pp. 217-236.

McCarthy's article provides a novel reading of Brooks's Lulu, focusing more on her New Woman-esque empowerment than her passivity, victimhood, or *femme-fatale* qualities. McCarthy discusses the gendered spectatorship of Weimar films, and pushes back against the idea that Brooks and Lulu were passive cinematic images to be consumed by the spectator. Instead, Lulu seems to find power in her own image, which McCarthy compares to the Weimar woman spectator feeling empowered through melodrama (citing Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets*). McCarthy looks closely at various scenes and stills within the film, presenting Lulu as mostly self-determined and impervious, a power that is underscored by her (and Brooks') physical dynamism and androgyny.

- 2018** Hutchinson, Pamela. *Pandora's Box (Die Büchse der Pandora)*. BFI Film Classics. Palgrave, 2018.

Hutchinson's book, as part of the British Film Institute's book series on classic films, provides a thorough introduction and overview of *Pandora's Box*. The book covers brief biographies of Pabst and Brooks, background into Wedekind and his Lulu plays, and the various sexual-cultural contexts that informed Wedekind, Pabst, and Brooks in their artistic directions. Hutchinson also gives information about the film's crew beyond Pabst, such as the film's producer, screenwriter, cinematographer, art director, and the erroneously-credited editor, as well as other rarely-discussed details such as the location and particularities of the film studio. Among the most helpful sections of this concise volume is the synopsis, where Hutchinson describes each act in order, complete with insightful commentary.

- 2019** Potter, Susan. "Troubling Sexual History: The Anachronistic Lesbian of *Pandora's Box*." *Queer Timing: The Emergence of Lesbian Sexuality in Early Cinema*. University of Illinois Press, 2019.

Potter's book is an important text in queer cinema studies. The first chapter is a highly compelling reading of the character Countess Geschwitz from *Pandora's Box* (played by Alice Roberts), one of the earliest on-screen lesbians. Potter discusses the contradictory and at-times careless understandings of Geschwitz—especially as they are mobilized to determine the character's "modernity" via her sexuality—from the character's own creator (Frank Wedekind) to contemporary scholars of the film. Potter also dwells on the changes to Geschwitz's character, storyline, and public reception as a result of the film's varied international censorship.

- 2022** Schwebel, Shoshana. "Lulu's Smile: An Archive of Trauma in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)." *The German Quarterly*, vol. 95, no. 2, 2022, pp. 149-166.

Schwebel's article focuses on one gesture of Lulu's—her dazzling smile—and argues that it both reveals (to the audience) and covers up (to herself and her admirers) a traumatic history of sexual trafficking. This history is implied in the film's story, but not made explicit, and is rarely analyzed as a factor in Lulu's character. Lulu relies on her smile throughout the film to placate would-be aggressors—a learned behaviour resulting from childhood trauma and gendered socialization, according to Schwebel. The smile becomes important as a minor, emotional, personal “archive” of sexual trauma that reflects the similar nature of archives of trauma more broadly.

- 2022** Schweiger, Sophie Johanna. "Pandora's Box (*Die Büchse der Pandora*, 1929)." *Lexicon of Global Melodrama*, edited by Heike Paul, Sarah Marak, Katharina Gerund, and Marius Henderson. Transcript, 2022, p. 35.

Schweiger's brief entry on *Pandora's Box* for the volume *Lexicon of Global Melodrama* connects the film to the genre of melodrama. Schweiger argues that seriality—seen, for instance, in the film's episodic structure, the many iterations of the Lulu figure across genres and eras, and Lulu's movement from lover to lover—is the main aspect that articulates the film's melodramatic mode. Yet Schweiger also argues that the film, and particularly Brooks' interpretation of Lulu, modernizes melodrama by giving the Lulu character agency, ambivalence, and a finite end to her seriality (her murder). Through Lulu (and Brooks), the film rebuffs its own melodramatic mode; Lulu refuses to be an embodiment of the melodramatic heroine, because she refuses the audience a straightforward identification with her character.



Screenshot of Louise Brooks in *Die Büchse der Pandora* (1929)

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Card, James. “[The ‘intense isolation’ of Louise Brooks.](#)” *Sight & Sound*, Summer 1958, pp. 240-245.

Gladysz, Thomas. *The Louise Brooks Society*, <https://www.pandorasbox.com/>.

Grossman, Julie. *Rethinking the Femme Fatale in Film Noir*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Hutchinson, Pamela. “What we still do in the shadows: why film noir will never die.” *The Guardian*, 4 Sep. 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/article/2024/sep/04/what-we-do-in-the-shadows-why-film-noir-will-never-die>. Accessed 26 May, 2025.

Hutchinson, Pamela. “‘Weimar Noir: Lounge Time’ in the Cinema of G. W. Pabst.” *WeimarCinema.Org*, <https://www.weimarcinema.org/essay/Hutchinson>. Accessed 20 June, 2025.

Leacock, Richard, and Susan Woll, directors. *Lulu in Berlin*. Brooks Project, Inc., 1971.

Littau, Karin. "Refractions of the Feminine: The Monstrous Transformations of Lulu." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 110, no. 4, 1995, pp. 888-912.

Neely, Hugh Munro, director. *Louise Brooks: Looking for Lulu*. Image Entertainment, 1998.

Petro, Patrice. *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*. Princeton University Press, 1989.

Wollen, Peter. "Brooks and the Bob," *Sight & Sound*, February, 1994.

Tynan, Kenneth. "[Louise Brooks Tells All](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1979/06/11/louise-brooks-tells-all)." *The New Yorker*, 3 June 1979.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1979/06/11/louise-brooks-tells-all>. Accessed 28 Feb. 2025.